

## **Panel Discussion--Connecting to the Interagency System**

***Panel Facilitator: Jim Whittington***

***Panelists; Mary Zabinski, Fire Communication Specialist, USDA Forest Service  
Southwestern Region***

***Jay Ellington, Fire Intelligence Coordinator Southwest Coordination Center***

***Dolores Maese, Public Affairs Officer, Santa Fe National Forest***

### **Jay Ellington**

Jay gave an overview powerpoint presentation on the Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) and the Southwest Area Wildland Fire Operations website. Jay noted that he worked as part of the Predictive Services Group, which includes the Geographic Area Meteorologists. He discussed the Resource Ordering Status System (ROSS) and some of products SWCC produces, including daily fire activity and resource status reports, and weekly, monthly, and seasonal fire weather/fire danger outlooks. He also discussed year-to-date fire summaries as well as some of the graphics and maps they use.

### **Mary Zabinski**

Mary spoke about her background as a Forest Service PAO and that she did not appreciate the depth of wildland fire until she came to the Southwest. She commented that the interagency mix in the southwestern United States is very strong and that her position had “morphed” over the years from writing speeches to being a fire IO. She said the Forest Service recognized the need for fire information specialists and gave her more responsibilities.

She began working with other agencies including BLM and NPS and as the Southwest Coordination Center began to develop, they began to understand the benefit of working together. From their experience came the realization that there was a need for qualified Information Officers on incidents because fire is important in the Southwest and the need to get information out is vital.

Jay came up with the idea for the website and once they began posting timely and pertinent information, the media began to take advantage of the site and also began learning more about wildland fire and asking for detailed information on fire incidents. The web site lists any fire-related press releases from any agency in the Southwest and provides relevant fire information in the off-season. As he is a National Park Service employee, he emphasized that the website is not a Forest Service site, but a truly interagency affiliated site that belongs to all agencies.

### **Dolores Maese**

Dolores Maese has worked her entire career at the Santa Fe National Forest and is a regional native familiar with culture and traditions and the fire history of the area. She is grateful for the SWCC and the interagency system that has grown in this area, because she knows all the agencies and their staff, a key reason as to why she feels she is successful in her job. She noted that the Santa Fe National Forest had six Type I incidents in 2002, and that the fire season is arriving earlier. Along with the early arrival of fire season is the need for earlier communication and interagency assistance.

There is a public affairs roundtable comprised of all agencies, tourism groups and emergency groups that meets quarterly to address how emergency situations would affect each group; they are focusing on the Santa Fe Water Shed which is overgrown. The interagency group is developing a worst-case scenario plan to help them create contingencies. They will also be conducting a media training in March which will involve training some reporters to give them the training and background into all aspects of wildland fire, safety and communications.

She said the communication between all parties involved in SWCC and other government offices has been extremely beneficial.

She summed up the presentation by reaffirming the benefits of interagency partnerships within the Southwest and that everyone has a stake in fire issues and no single agency can do it alone.